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Paper

"YOU HAVE AMONG YOU MANY A PURCHASED SLAVE": THE MEANING OF SOME PROBLEMATIC PASSAGES IN *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

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It is said that the text of *The Merchant of Venice* has some problematic passages in order to be performed as a comedy. The article explains the meaning of the passages considering a historical idea of "the myth of Venice" which spread over Elizabethan England. At a glance, these passages seem to prevent the play being interpreted as a comedy, but in fact, they reflect the myth, and clothe the play with the exoticism of Venice.

Key Words: *Shakespeare, comedy, The Merchant of Venice, the myth of Venice*

INTRODUCTION

The Merchant of Venice is one of the most popular comedies of Shakespeare. In the First Folio, this play was categorized as a comedy, but since the end of World War II, the play has not been performed as a comedy, but as a problem play, or sometimes even as a tragedy. After the Holocaust, it seems inhuman to describe a Jew simply as a villain who is defeated and laughed at.

In fact, the stage history of *The Merchant of Venice* is the history of how Shylock is treated. First, Shylock was performed as a villain who was defeated, then as a Jew that was persecuted by Christians, and sometimes as a brave Jew who protested against Christians.[1] Why has this play been open to such various interpretations? One of the reasons is the author gives Shylock human aspects, and at the same time the Venetians many faults. As a result of this, there arise problems with regards the final treatment of characters and the moral evaluation of them. With respect to their morality, Shylock and the Venetians are so blurred that the villains and the virtuous can be interchangeable.[2] In fact, there are contradicting interpretations of the play; sometimes Shylock is virtuous and the Venetians are the villains, sometimes Shylock is the villain and the Venetians are virtuous.

Why does Shakespeare describe the Venetians with some faults? Why does the author allow Shylock to criticize the Venetians for their discrimination against him? I'd like to consider these problems. First of all, we will check the passages that show the Venetians' faults, passages that are contrary to the view that Christians are good and Jews are bad. The critics who regard *The Merchant of Venice* as a failure or Shylock as a hero seem to base their decisions upon the problematic passages. For instance, some criticize Bassanio and Lorenzo for their primary purposes in marriage being not love but money, and Bassanio and Jessica for being extravagant. Others criticize Jessica for her exchanging her mother's rings, a keepsake from her mother to Shylock, for a monkey. Antonio and Portia are criticized as racists. On the other hand, there are some passages and situations which justify Shylock, even though he is a villain. For instance, we cannot help sympathizing with Shylock in his situation because he is discriminated against as a social outcast by the Venetians. The reason we are full aware of his terrible situation is because he is allowed to to make complaints, which sometimes have an intelligible basis.

These problematic passages have been sometimes ignored and deleted from the script when it was performed on stage because it is thought to be impossible to perform the whole play with consistency.[3] The contemporaries of Shakespeare were, however, able to enjoy the whole play without the excision of any passages. If we can bridge the gap between the Elizabethans and us we can understand the play more deeply and precisely.

What kind of information did Shakespeare want to convey with the problematic passages? We can say at least that these passages mean that Shakespeare didn't at all want to create a play in which good Christians defeat a bad Jew. Then, what kind of play did he want to write? Barber says, "*The Merchant of Venice*, as its

title indicates, exhibits the beneficence of civilized wealth, the something-for-nothing which wealth gives to those who use it graciously to live together in a humanly knit group. It also deals, in the role of Shylock, with anxieties about money, and its power to set men at odds."[4] To find the author's intention with certainty is impossible, but if we suppose the author intended to write a romantic comedy set in a ruthless capitalistic society, some of the problems should be solvable.

The final goal of this paper is to explain the meaning of the problematic passages considering Shakespeare's intention. In Chapter I, I investigate how Shakespeare created the setting and the characters of the play. If we examine the characteristics of Venice and the Venetians in the play, we will discover how much the characters are influenced by the city; for instance: Venice is a place which gives financial interest the highest priority and the Venetians also seem to give special priority to financial interest. From these considerations, we can suppose that the author created the characters suitable to some extent for the setting. In Chapter II, we will examine and explain the problematic passages listed above, adopting the supposition we have obtained in the previous chapter. Some of the problematic passages are explicable by this approach, but there are still other cases difficult to be solved, such as: the reason why the author didn't give Antonio a happy ending. In Chapter III, to approach these kinds of problems, we will consider what Shakespeare was saying and showing in the play. To investigate the problems Shakespeare wanted to show in the play, we will consider the Elizabethans' attitude to wealth, trade, merchants, and other matters.

To know the attitudes of Shakespeare's contemporaries, I'd like to examine how the play itself treats the characters. It is true that the Venetians have lot of faults as some critics point out, but sometimes their faults seem to be ignored. In spite of their faults, they are treated as heroes or heroines throughout the play. Of course such treatment is the intention of the author, but there was common understanding between the author and the audiences. Especially, festive images and mood play an important role in *The Merchant of Venice*. Rhodes analyzes Falstaff in *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth* considering the relationship between the moral level and a symbolic level that includes grotesque bodily words. Rhodes thinks that Falstaff rises from the moral to the symbolic level as the story goes on, and achieves a symbolic function to integrate the difference between comedy and history, festival and politics.[5] And the images help the audience to understand the story. For example, Falstaff says and does lots of immoral things, but the festive mood in the play leads the audiences to laugh at him and overlook his immorality. I'd like to suggest that the festive images in *The Merchant of Venice* play the same role as those in *The First of King Henry the Fourth.*

CHPTER I: VENICE AND THE VENETIANS

The idea of Venice in *The Merchant of Venice*

How did Shakespeare create the image of Venice in *The Merchant of Venice*? In *Il Pecorone*, which is a primary source of *The Merchant of Venice*, Venice is described as a port with many merchants,[6] festivities,[7] and strict justice.[8] Shakespeare's Venice is much more varied and complicated than that of the source, and also different from historical facts.[9] For the English of the Shakespearean era, Renaissance Italy was the most attractive area because it was the most culturally advanced and commercially prosperous in Europe. That was why there were lots of plays set in Italian cities, and Venice was one of the most popular locations.[10] Because Elizabethans obtained information on Venice through books and travelers, they had some common images of Venice: so called, "the myth of Venice."[11] Venice was regarded as a city-state not only with international trade, freedom for foreigners, political justice, strict laws, wealth, luxury, and festivals, but also wickedness, corruption, and Catholicism.[12] These images seem to play an important role for Shakespeare in creating his Venice in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Here, we will examine how Shakespeare describes his Venice. First of all, in the conversation among Salerio, Solanio, and Antonio as early as the opening scene, their lines show the influence of the myth. For instance, Antonio's "argosies" and their cargos: "spices" and "silks" indicate Venice's wealth, luxury, and international trade (1.1.8-40). Then, Shakespeare uses other elements of the myth: political justice, freedom for foreigners, and strict laws to explain Venice's economic policy. Antonio explains to Solanio the reason why the duke cannot ignore the law:

> The duke cannot deny the course of law:
> For the commodity that strangers have
> With us in Venice, if it be denied,
> Will much impeach the justice of the state;
> Since that the trade and profit of the city
> Consisteth of all nations.
>
> (3.3.26-31)[13]

The author gives the reason why Venice stresses these elements as being that Venice's commercial prosperity depends on fairness under the law which guarantees freedom for foreigners and brings many merchants from all over the world to the city. These foreign merchants bring wealth to Venice. As a result, Venice has achieved the peak of her prosperity. From these lines, we are convinced that the Venetian political, legal and diplomatic goal is to maintain her financial prosperity.[14]

Furthermore, in the court scene, as Shylock continues his relentless march toward the fulfillment of his bond, he says to the duke: "If you deny it, let the danger light / Upon your charter and your city's freedom" (4.1.38-39). Here, Shylock warns that the city will lose the international community's trust[15] because Shylock is "an alien" (4.1.345) in Venice, therefore, his case will "be recorded for a precedent, / And many an error by the same example / Will rush into the state" (4.1.216-18). Shylock suggests that his trial will not be limited to his personal case, but will be a case for all foreigners concerned with Venice because their freedom will be withdrawn. What Shylock claims here is that once foreigners find the Venetian court denies the law, they will leave the city. As a result of this, Venice will lose her prosperity. From the explanation, we notice that Shakespeare describes Venice as a functioning society, "a community united by a common love of impersonal justice," [16] a society which doesn't attach great significance to blood relationships and neighborly companionship. In other words, Venice is an international commercial city that doesn't care about differences of nationality or religion if a person has money or something to sell, and profits the city.[17]

The characters of the Venetians

The Venetians are criticized for being too much engaged in money matters. For instance, the play begins with Bassanio's debt as a result of his extravagance, which is the primary cause from which the story of the play develops. Jessica and Lorenzo spend all of the money they steal from Shylock while they travel around Europe. I think Shakespeare wants to introduce people who are suitable for Venice.[18] As examined above, because Venice is deeply concerned with money matters, the author's Venetians must be suitable for the setting.

That means that the characters are also influenced by the common images of Venice to some extent: luxury, festivities, and commercial wealth. It is easy to notice that the Venetians have these attitudes. For instance, the extravagance of Bassanio and Jessica is an example of luxury. The Venetians are described as festival lovers and they attend masques in the play. The play starts with the melancholy of Antonio, and then a money matter arises between Antonio and Bassanio in the foreground, so it is difficult to see that other characters are busy preparing for masques or dinner party in the background. Moreover, the young Venetians often talk to each other about feasts. This Venetian attitude is also introduced in a source of the play. As stated above, in *Il Pecorone,* Venetians are described as often having feasts.[19] When they say good-bye, Lorenzo confirms the meeting place for their feast: "but at dinner-time, I pray you, have in mind where we must meet" (1.1.70-73). Preparing for the masques, the Venetians mention feasts: "we are stay'd for at Bassanio's feast" (2.6.48), and Basanio says to his servant: "Return in haste, for I do feast to-night" (2.2.163).

Another important Venetian characteristic is the tendency toward "hazard," and "venture." Antonio calls his business a "venture." It is natural to think that a maritime power like Venice praises the spirit of hazard and venture, but the characteristics have importance not only in Venice but also in Belmont. In the casket scene, the inscription on the lead casket says: "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" (2.4.21). Shakespeare is said to have borrowed the plot from *Gesta Romanorum* in which Giannetto, the protagonist should choose from gold, silver, or lead vessels, and in which each has an inscription. Shakespeare seems to borrow the inscriptions on the gold and the silver caskets from the original source, but he rewrites the inscription on the lead casket. In *Gesta Romanorum,* the superscription says: "who so chooseth me, shall finde that God hath disposed."[20] From this fact, we can understand the author's intention that the characteristic has a special importance in the play.

The reason why the spirit of venture and hazard is praised seems to be that the author intended to contrast Antonio's international trading with Shylock's loan-sharking. Cohen differentiates merchants from usurers quoting from *The Death of Vsvry, or Disgrace of Vsvers*: "the usurer dose not, like 'the merchant that crosse the seas, adventure', receiving instead a guaranteed return on his money."[21] To say nothing of Antonio, Bassanio is also a risk taker to some extent. The reason why Bassanio is accepted in Belmont is because he casts his fate to the lead casket. In addition, after Shylock speaks of on Jacob's episode, Antonio claims that "what Jacob did" was a venture: "This was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for" (1.3.86) because it was "A thing not in his power to bring to pass, / But

sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven" (1.3.87-88). Compared to Antonio, Bassanio's episode in Belmont appears a small matter, but similar in leaving everything to chance as Jacob did. As examined, "venture" and "hazard" are praised throughout the play and both Antonio and Bassanio have the spirit.

Friendship is another significant characteristic which is often seen among the Venetians. They help, cooperate and take care of each other throughout the play. The Venetians seem to live their lives showing concern for each other. At the opening, Salerio and Solanio worry about Antonio's state of gloomy depression. Even after the bankruptcy of Antonio, they keep supporting him; Solanio accompanies Antonio to ask Shylock to show him mercy; and Salerio delivers Antonio's letter to Belmont. The Venetians help Lorenzo to make Jessica's escape by taking advantage of the confusion of masques. In the court scene, the Venetians visit the court to shout support for Antonio. In addition, the author shows that Antonio is a man who attaches great importance to friendship. A main reason why Antonio hates interest is because his religion prohibits it, but another reason is concerned with friendship because he thinks taking interest and friendship are contradictory to each other: "for when did friendship take / A breed for barren metal of his friend?" (1.3.128-129). He hates interest because it may break the bond of friendship among people.

CHPTER II: THE PROBLEMATIC PASSAGES AND SITUATIONS

In Chapter I, we have examined how Shakespeare describes Venice and the Venetians. As a result of this, we have found that he seems to create images of Venice from "the myth of Venice" and sources, and that he creates characters deeply committed to the character of Venice. In Chapter II, we will examine the problematic passages from the point of view of the characteristics of Venice and the Venetians.

Bassanio

Bassanio is the most successful of all the characters. He gets almost everything by marrying Portia who gives him inexhaustible wealth. Nevo and Auden have said that he is not worthy of his success mainly because he is a lavish spender,[22] but this claim seems to be a reaction from the point of view of modern moral sense which usually hates extravagance.

Bassanio admits that he squanders his fortune because he can't stop his extravagance: "How much I have disabled mine estate, / By something showing a more swelling port / Than my faint means would grant continuance" (1.1.123-125). It is natural to suppose that the author thinks it is an important part of his character because these lines are given at the very beginning of the play when the characters are introduced to the audience. It is true that a hero with heavy debts and spendthrift habits is usually unsuitable for a romantic comedy, but these attitudes are very typical from the point of view of the Venetian myth which says Venice "was a pleasure-loving city."[23] Bassanio is a hero Shakespeare creates to be suitable for Venice.

The next problem of Bassanio is that his love for Portia is suspect.[24] The top priority of his intention to marry Portia seems to be her money: "To unburthen all my plots and purposes / How to get clear of all the debts I owe" (1.1.133-134). When he explains his plan to Antonio in these lines, we notice the fact that Bassanio always begins his words with a money matter: "In Belmont is a lady richly left / And she is fair, and, fairer than that word, / Of wondrous virtues" (1.1.161-163). When he lists her virtues, he points out her wealth first. Still more, Bassanio likens his courtship behavior to Jason's adventure of the Greek myth: "her sunny locks / Hang on her temples like a golden fleece; / Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand, / And many Jasons come in quest of her" (1.2.169-172). After Bassanio selects the right casket, Gratiano tells of Bassanio's success to Salerio: "We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece" (3.2.24). Here, Gratiano regards Portia in the same light as the Golden Fleece, which was a precious treasure. Such an attitude, more love for articles of value than that for a lover, is not suitable for a hero of a romantic comedy. However, as one of the Venetians, Bassanio's attitude is quite understandable. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Venice is described as a place that gives financial interest the highest priority. Bassanio is influenced by the ideas of the city in which he lives. For him, both Portia and her wealth are important.[25]

Still more, as examined just above, Bassanio's courting behavior is compared to the famous adventure of Jason. We should remember that the spirit of adventure is a feature of the Venetians, and highly praised in the play. In comparison with Jason's, his adventure is rather easy, but the play seems to encourage us to praise his courting behavior as an adventure.[26]

Walter Cohen says that we must pay the closest attention to Lancelot Gobbo, because of "his physical, social, ideological, and linguistic proximity to the

audience." [27] The episode of Lancelot's leaving Shylock to be employed by Bassanio indicates that Bassanio might have had a broad base of support from the majority of contemporary audiences in Shakespeare's theater.

Portia

Fiedler criticizes Portia's prejudice agaist foreigners: "In Belmont, where she recites the litany of her prejudices into the ear of her maid."[28] It is true she is a racist from the point of view of modern audiences, but racial discrimination was not a serious moral matter of that time.[29]

Moreover, we should consider in what context Portia's conversation with her maid occurs. They are in a festive mood at the time of their conversation. Bakhtin shows a case where people "bring the conversation down to a strongly emphasized bodily level of food, drink, digestion, and sexual life."[30] He calls the case "degradation" and regards it as the ultimate level of carnivalesque. We find this type of degradation when Portia talks with Nerissa about her suitors. They are all noble men from famous families in Europe and Africa, but Portia brings them down to a bodily level. Regarding the Neapolitan prince: "that's a colt indeed...I am much afread my lady his mother played false with smith" (1.2.39-43). His mother is brought down to the level of her sexual life. Falconbridge, the young baron from England, and the duke of Saxony's nephew are also criticized at a bodily level. Portia criticizes Falconbridge because he is suited oddly and the young German because he is a drunkard. This festive mood indicates that we shouldn't take the conversation between Portia and Nerrisa seriously.

The story ends as Portia wishes. She is released from her dead father's will at last, and able to marry the man she loves. As examined above, we shouldn't take too seriously Bassanio's attitude of love for money, but it is true that Bassanio seems a little faithless in his love of her, and such a situation is unsuitable for the heroin of a romantic comedy:

> This house, these servants, and this same myself
> Are yours, my lord. I give them with this ring;
> Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
> Let it presage the ruin of your love,
> And be my vantage to exclaim on you.
> (3.2.163-174)

We have the impression from her lines that she is very devoted to her husband, but Portia seems to gain revenge on him through the episode of the rings. When the young doctor who helps Antonio is revealed to be Portia, he is not able to look her in the eye. Portia forced her husband to swear that he "never more will break an oath with" her (5.1.248). Bassanio swears he will never betray his wife from then on. In addition, Portia threatens her husband by insisting on her right to betray her husband if Bassanio loses the ring. She succeeds in not only getting him to swear not to betray her but also in controlling him through the episode of the rings.

Jessica

Critics have raised some questions concerning Jessica. Jessica has many moral faults; she steals money and jewels from her father and wastes them during her escape with Lorenzo; Nevo especially criticizes Jessica for exchanging her dead mother's ring for a monkey.[31] Jessica, however, can marry Lorenzo and eventually has the right to inherit Shylock's fortune after his death. Why does the author describe her like this?

Lorenzo and Jessica's episode is added to the play by the author, who seems to borrow the idea from Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Masuccio's *Il Novellino*.[32] It is said that Shakespeare wanted to make Shylock's revenge reasonable by adding this episode. To make Shylock full of revenge, it is necessary to cause Shylock to bear a grudge against Antonio and keep demanding fulfillment of the contract.[33] I agree with this explanation because a man like Shylock doesn't get shocked even if Lorenzo takes his daughter away. He would be glad because he can cut down on his food expenses. To deal a deathblow to Shylock, Jessica's stealing of his money is necessary:

> Why, there, there, there, there! a diamond gone,
> cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfort! The curse
> never fell upon our nation till now; I never felt it
> till now: two thousand ducats in that; and other
> precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter
> were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear!
> would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in
> her coffin! (3.1.76-82)

Here, his daughter and money are treated equally.[34] Shylock is a character who is most likely to express the idea of Venice. Jessica's elopement seems to mean that she not only gives up Judaism to be a Christian but also runs away from Venice to the world of the Venetians in which friendship and wastefulness is emphasized.

It is true that her exchanging her mother's ring for a monkey seems to be overdone, but spending the money she steals is the event that shocks Shylock the most. The problem is which bond is stronger for Jessica, that

with her father, which means Judaism, or that with Lorenzo, which is Christianity. We should recognize that when she quits her father, she becomes a Christian and she discards her father and Judaism: "I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me a Christian" (3.5.17). It seems natural to accept her claim, and admit that she completely belongs to the Venetians from then on. On the other hand, as her dead mother was a Jew, it would seem that she belongs to Shylock. Therefore, we should regard Jessica as one of Christians who defeats a Jew. The greater sorrow Shylock felt, the happier the contemporary audiences became.

Furthermore, we should notice how these episodes are given. Firstly, Jessica's escape scene is done under cover of the confusion of the masque. The Venetians was going gather in front of Shylock's house with their faces heavily painted in their costumes. Some of them had to wear the polka dotted clothes of fools and Lorenzo disguised Jessica as a torchbearer. Even though the Elizabethan stage was very simple, the audiences had to be able to ascertain the festival mood from this scene. Secondly, Jessica's monkey episode is given in a very comical scene where Tubal tells Shylock good news and bad news in turn, so Shylock shows joy and sadness one after another dizzyingly quickly. Barber explains the scene: "Some critics have left the rhythm of the scene behind to dwell on the pathos of the ring he had from Leah when he was a bachelor... There is pathos; but it is being fed into the comic mill and makes the laughter all the more hilarious."[35] We may say the play deals with this scene as an event to laugh away.

As we have examined, Jessica's behavior is not as bad as moderns would think, but it is true that she is described as a morally suspect person to some extent. I think this is why the author treats Lorenzo and Jessica differently from Portia and Bassanio. For instance, in Act 5, they talk about famous ancient lovers whose love ended in tragedy. This episode casts an ominous shadow on the future of Lorenzo and Jessica. Furthermore, Lorenzo's love for Jessica is suspect when he is late for the arranged meeting with Jessica; Gratiano implies that he has already tired of her: "That ever holds: who riseth from a feast / With that keen appetite that he sits down?... All things that are, / Are with more spirit chased than enjoy'd" (2.6.8-13). The problem of Lorenzo's love for Jessica is never solved, while Portia seems to solve the problem of Bassanio's love for her through the episode of the rings.

Antonio

Antonio is one of the Venetians who defeat Shylock, but he seems to be excluded from his friends. While the other Venetians are described to enjoy their lives and be hedonistic, Antonio is described as having a melancholic temperament. First of all, the other Venetians are described as festival lovers; on the other hand, Antonio has some anti-festival tendencies. In the opening, Antonio is melancholy, and doesn't take part in the masques that the other Venetians participate in. We should notice that it is he that comes to tell Gratiano of the abrupt termination of the masques: 'No masque to-night--- the wind is come about---" (2.6.64). There are some examples of melancholic individuals being ostracized from carnival.[36] As mentioned in Introduction, in this play, the festive mood seems to influence the audience. If so, contemporary audiences had to have a negative image of Antonio because of his attitude.

Antonio admits that he is different from the others: "A stage where every man must play a part, / And mine a sad one" (1.1.78-79). Moreover, his sense of self-identity is so negative that he seems to lose all hope in life: "I am a tainted wether of the flock, / Meetest for death: the weakest kind of fruit / Drops earliest to the ground; and so let me" (4.1.114-116). According to Halio, "tainted" means "diseased, with a suggestion of moral degeneration or corruption," and a "wether" means a castrated ram.[37] Antonio's self–identity as "a tainted wether" may lead us to see him as "an unconscious homosexual" as some critics suggest.[38] Such descriptions are unusual for a winner.

Antonio is not only isolated from his friends but also unsuitable for Venice. As stated in Chapter 1, Venice is described as an international commercial center where financial interest is considered to be the most important; on the other hand, the Venetians are described as people who make much of friendship. Among them, Antonio especially shows this notable trait. He helps not only his friend Bassanio financially but also helps borrowers from Shylock: "I oft deliver'd from his forfeitures / Many that have at times made moan to me" (2.2.163). An able merchant would, normally, postpone his profit to everything, but Antonio doesn't do so. Still more, Antonio is described as "one in whom / The ancient Roman honour more appears / Than any that draws breath in Italy" (3.2.294-295). These lines show Antonio has a classical value. He is described as being a person who respects the old value rather than the new values of emerging capitalism. Moreover, as examined Chapter 1, as a Venetian merchant who is engaged in international trade, Antonio should follow the Venetian law which guarantees freedom for foreigners, but he breaks the rule by trying to exclude Shylock from the society. Antonio is described as unsuitable

for Venice.

Shylock

We have considered the reason why the Venetians are described as having some faults and problems. Here we will consider why Shylock is allowed to criticize the Venetians and why his criticism can be supported. For instance, when he criticizes the Venetians for their discrimination against him, Shylock points out that many Venetians have slaves: "You have among you many a purchased slave, / Which, (like your asses and your dogs and mules) / You use in abject and in slavish parts" (4.1.90-92).[39] And Shylock criticizes Antonio for his discrimination against him: "You, that did void your rheum upon my beard / And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur / Over your threshold" (1.3.112-113). The author justifies Shylock's words by giving us evidence. Antonio shows his prejudice against Shylock obviously in his lines: "I am as like to call thee so again, / To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too" (1.3.125-126). Antonio's attitude seems to show serious conflict between Shylock and him, but his attitude is intolerant. Why does the author support Shylock's criticism of the Venetians?

It is because he is right in doing so to some extent. As I have pointed out in Chapter I, according to "the myth of Venice," the law of Venice guarantees the "city's freedom" for foreigners, therefore it should be one of the most important rules all the Venetians should keep, but Shylock reveals that there are some people who can't enjoy "the freedom." For many of Venetians are said to have slaves. The Venetians in this play, especially Antonio, show discrimination against Shylock, who thinks that Antonio persecutes him because he is a Jew:

> He hath disgraced me, and
> hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses,
> mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my
> bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine
> enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew.
> (3.1.48-52).

The reason why Shylock's famous protest against discrimination has the power to move a lot of audiences is not only because his protest appeals to moderns but also because his protest is reasonable even on the Venetian basis:

> Hath
> not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poisonus, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?
> (3.1.52-60).

Shylock asserts that here Jews should be treated as the same sort of beings as Christians. During the court scene, Shylock's claim is that of following the law which should be equal for not only Venetians, but also aliens. Yet our doubts about the moral quality of the Venetians has become serious when we are informed that not only Venetians but also even the Venetian law doesn't treat aliens the same as Venetians. Portia says: "If it be proved against an alien / That by direct or indirect attempts / He seek the life of any citizen, / The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive / Shall seize one half his goods" (4.1.345-49). These lines force us to ask Portia what will happen if a Venetian does so, and in this case, if the citizen will receive the same punishment as Shylock does. In the latter part of the play, we must be skeptical about the legitimacy of Venetian law, which is said to be very fair, but is actually not so fair.

CHPTER III: THE MEANING OF THE PROBLEMATIC PASSAGES AND SITUATIONS

In Chapter II, I have stated that the reason for Antonio's depression is that his character is different from that of Venice and the Venetians. In addition, the reason Shylock is allowed to criticize the Venetians is because he is right to do so to some extent. However, the reason why the author describes Antonio as isolated, and why the Venetians are described as having faults, are still not known. To answer these questions, in this chapter, we have to investigate the intention of the author. If we suppose that the reason why Shakespeare allows Shylock to criticize the Venetians is because the author himself is critical of Venice and the Venetians, the questions are solvable. Namely, the author doesn't empathize with the main characters completely, but detaches himself from them. It seems that having an Italian location and Italian protagonists made it easy for the author and his audiences to keep a mental distance from the Venetians. Some critics have suggested that the contemporaries of Shakespeare who lived in the transaction period in London not only regarded Venetian society as a coming society in their near future but also showed anxieties about the coming new economical system.[40] The faults of the Venetians seem

to reflect both the author and audiences' attitude.

Then, why did Shakespeare and his contemporaries have a poor opinion of Antonio? In Act 5, Antonio and the three couples gather at Belmont and all of them have a party to celebrate their marriages. Antonio, however, attends the party alone. Where will he go after the party when the other newly married couples go to their wedding-beds?[41] Why does the author treat him like this? It is Antonio who sacrifices himself for his friend, and confronts a life-threatening situation, but he gets nothing in return for this. Three of his ships which are said to be shipwrecked return safely, but this is not because of his sacrifice, but because of his luck. As Auden suggested, Ansaldo who plays the part of Antonio in *Il Pecorone* marries the equivalent of Nerrisa at the end of the story,[42] so it would end with happy marriages like most comedies do. Why did Shakespeare design to give Antonio such an unhappy ending?

It is true that Shylock and Antonio are opposed to each other strictly, but in actuality, they suffer similar hardships in the play. Only Antonio and Shylock lose both love and money all at once.[43] Antonio loses Bassanio and all of his ships for a while, though some of them return safely at the end of the play. Shylock loses his daughter and money at the same time. In addition, Shakespeare gives only Antonio a role of dealing with money matters among the Venetians. We are not shown how the other Venetians earn a living. Moreover, Shylock and Antonio have common distinctive features. In fact, they are so similar that Portia can't discriminate Antonio from Shylock when she meets them for the first time: "Which is the merchant here? And which is the Jew?" (4.1.170). Here, the author seems to encourage us to see that they are birds of a feather.

Firstly, they have similar ways of dealing with large amounts of money. Both Antonio and Shylock have the features of the coming new economical system, global trade and finance. Both of them live in Venice which was the most advanced center of world business with business partners all over the world. To say nothing of Antonio, Shylock also engages in the worldwide business. We know this from Shylock's conversation with Tubal (3.1.73-105). The contemporary people recognized them as businessmen who dealt with enormous amount of money and feared the financial power of them.[44] Secondly, it is true that their roles are clearly differentiated. There is supposedly a strict barrier between Shylock as a usurer and Antonio as a merchant in the play. But in Shakespearean England, merchants were quite often usurers, too.[45] The audience couldn't distinguish which was a merchant and which was a usurer in actual life. Portia's lines seem to have reflected the impression of the contemporary audiences. As examined above, the author's unkind treatment of Antonio, who is referred to as an international trader, and the faults of the Venetians may reflect the anxieties, common with the contemporaries, concerning the power of money.

Finally, I'd like to consider that which Shakespeare wanted to show in the play. Cohen says a function of art is to solve problems that are difficult to solve in the real world.[46] If so, what problem did Shakespeare intend to solve? Barber thinks the author tries to show in *The Merchant of Venice* how to cope with the anxieties concerning money: "It was in expressing and so coping with these anxieties about money that Shakespeare developed in Shylock a comic antagonist."[47] We will examine how the author tried to eliminate his contemporaries' anxieties about money matters in the play.

First of all, even when the economical power of Antonio and Shylock is considered, their abilities are doubtful because their wealth is described as being limited. When Bassanio asks Antonio for a loan, the money Antonio has with him is less than three thousand ducats. That is why he has to borrow money from Shylock, but even Shylock doesn't have enough money in hand, so he must borrow the rest of money from Tubal. It is true that merchants don't keep large amounts of currency in hand but invest their money in their businesses, but both of them can't provide cover for the money Bassanio requests. Moreover when Antonio is bankrupt, we know he has "creditors" (3.1.103-105). His self-financed fund isn't enough to run his trading business. Furthermore, at the opening of the play, Salerio points out the fragility of Antonio's wealth:

> Should I go to church
> And see the holy edifice of stone,
> And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
> Which touching but my gentle vessel's side,
> Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
> Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,
> And, in a word, but even now worth this,
> And now worth nothing? (1.1.29-36)

Antonio refutes Salerio on the grounds that he distributes the risk by dispatching many ships to various parts of the world. Salerio's lines have a role in predicting a future event in the play, the shipwrecks of Antonio's argosies, and at the same time indicate that Antonio's wealth isn't stable.

On the other hand, Portia's financial power is

described as being far above that of Antonio and Shylock. When she hears that Antonio's debt due to Shylock is three thousand ducats, she says: "What, no more? / Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond; / Double six thousand, and then treble that" (3.2.298-299). Moreover she has enough money to give Bassanio "the petty debt twenty times over" immediately (3.2.306). In Venice, even Antonio and Shylock who seem to be the wealthiest men there can't cover three thousand ducats at once. As the amount of money Portia can offer is so large, her wealth seems to have no sense of reality. For in sharp contrast to Portia, we know exactly how Shylock and Antonio make their fortunes. The way Portia, actually her father, accumulated wealth is unknown. Considering Portia lives in a stately mansion and the location of Belmont is in a province, maybe her father was a landowner who was in the established ruling class, with whom the audiences were familiar.[48] By giving Portia infinite wealth and defeating Antonio and Shylock, Shakespeare tried to overcome the anxieties concerning money. Walter Cohen comments on the intention of the author: "Shakespeare's goal is thus, once again, to rebind what had been torn asunder into a new unity, under aristocratic leadership."[49]

CONCLUSION

The problem of *The Merchant of Venice* is that the play has passages that are contrary to the view that Christians are virtuous and Jews are evil. We have investigated the reason why Shakespeare wrote the problematic passages.

In Chapter I, we have studied how Shakespeare created the images of Venice in *The Merchant of Venice*. He seems to have created it not only borrowing the images from his direct source, *Il Pecorone,* but also building on "the myth of Venice." As far as Venice's political platform is concerned, Shakespeare describes Venice as a place where financial interest is most important and the differences of race and religion are not important as long as someone has something to trade. On the other hand, the Venetians are described as being partially influenced by the city, for instances, they have an immediate interest in money, they like to live in splendor, and they are adventurous. They, however, are also described as people who always take care of each other and prize friendship. Their friendship, however, sometimes shows exclusive attitudes towards aliens.

If we suppose that Shakespeare created the images of Venice, faithfully reflecting its common images, and that he also created the characters suitable for the setting, we can solve some problems many critics have seen in *The Merchant of Venice.* In Chapter II, we have shown that the problematic passages and situations can be explained by the principles of both Venice and the Venetians. We have investigated the reason why the play has the passages which indicate the faults of the Christians and support the legitimacy of Shylock. Consequently, we have solved some of the problems; for instance, the extravagance of some Venetians is an extraneous criticism; and Shylock is right when he exposes the hypocrisy of the Venetians. From the problematic passages, we know that the author doesn't see Venice as an ideal future prototype of London. However, the reason why Shakespeare wrote the passages is still unknown.

In an effort to understand the reason why Shakespeare wrote the passages, we have investigated the intention of the author in Chapter III. Why did Shakespeare enter Antonio to the stage alone among three couples in Act 5? The author could have had him married to someone, as in *Il Pecorone*. We have investigated the reason for Antonio's poor treatment. Some critics point out as a historical fact that the contemporaries of Shakespeare had common anxieties about mercantilism, especially the power of money. Antonio's bad treatment may have reflected the anxieties of the audiences. To say nothing of Shylock, Antonio, who is an emerging bourgeoisie, also has enormous wealth. In the play, Shylock is described as a real threat to the Venetians, but implicitly the audiences regarded Antonio as a person who was able to pose a threat to them. To overcome the anxieties concerning the coming new economy and the threat of money, Portia is described as having a far larger amount of wealth than both Antonio and Shylock. Portia overcomes them not only legally but also financially. She is a landowner, and Shakespeare's plan was to overcome the anxieties by restoring the old social system.

I have supposed that what Shakespeare was showing in the play was a romantic comedy in a ruthless society. At the opening, both Bassanio and Portia have problems to solve. Bassanio has heavy debt and Portia is bounded by her dead father's will. If they are married, they can solve their problems at once. To ask Portia to marry him, Bassanio asks Antonio to lend him money, but borrowing money from Shylock leads to risking Antonio's life. As our lives will be endangered if we borrow money from loan sharks, the same situation can be seen in the play. Shylock is a symbol of a threat of the emerging commercial society. Consequently, Shakespeare solved the problem in the

play as stated above.

Shakespeare's solution seems odd from a modern point of view. First of all, it was impossible for landowners to reunite the old social bond that had been dismantled by the commercial economy. Shakespeare was able to observe the emerging bourgeoisie overtly accumulate wealth. This is why Portia's wealth has no reality while Shylock and Antonio are described as having to take specific measures to accumulate their wealth. From a modern point of view, which knows the later history of England and Italy, it is easy to know that the world Shakespeare created wouldn't work well in practice, but we should notice the author's limitation in not being able to predict future events. Secondly, some characters seem to have been designed to have contradictory characteristics. For instance, Antonio is praised as being an adventurous merchant representative of the emerging bourgeoisie and as a respectful person with traditional values. On the other hand, he is also described as being negative because of his melancholic character and unconscious homosexuality. Why did the author describe Antonio as being a person full of such contradictions? I have reached the conclusion that the audiences' and the author's attachment to old values, namely antipathy to the power of money, caused Shakespeare to give Antonio these negative characteristics.

As I have stated above, to know the author's intention is impossible, so that which has been stated above is only a hypothesis, but its accuracy could be improved. To do so, much more should be known about historical facts about the contemporaries of Shakespeare, especially, their attitudes towards merchants, usurers, Venice, Venetians, Jews. Moreover, to understand further Shakespeare's treatment of the Italian setting, his Italian plays should be studied, especially *Othello*, since it is another play set in Venice that deals with discrimination towards a foreigner.

Note

1) Jay L. Halio, Introduction to *The Merchant of Venice*, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994), 58-83.

2) "The ironic depth in *The Merchant of Venice* results from a tension not between two static images of Shylock, but between those textual features that strengthen and those features that undermine the popular idea of an insurmountable difference between Christian and Jew," Rene Girard, "To Entrap the Wisest: Sacrificial Ambivalence in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Richard III*" *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 247

3) Halio, 29.

4) C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), 166-167; "The play persistently attempts to establish a congruence between economic and moral conduct, between outer and inner wealth; to depict a society in which human relationship are not exploitable," Walter Cohen, "*The Merchant of Venice* and the Possibility of Historical Criticism." *English Literary History*, 49 (1982) 765-89; rpt. in *New Casebooks: The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Martin Coyle (New York: St. Martin's Press), 80.

5) Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge, 1980), 121-122.

6) "...many merchants joined together in offering to pay the money...," Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 472.

7) "Giannetto began to frequent the noble men of Venice and to pay visits, dine out and give dinners," ibid. , 464.

8) "Venice had a reputation as a place of strict justice," ibid. , 472.

9) The most famous instances are that Shylock doesn't live in the ghetto, and is allowed to be a moneylender.

10) "Venice, to the Elizabethans, was in some ways what Hollywood was to the rest of the world in the 1930's, or perhaps it would be better to say a mixture of Hollywood and Paris: the glamorous, daring, brilliant, and wicked city," A. D. Nuttall, "*The Merchant of Venice*," *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), rpt. in Harold Bloom, ed., *William Shakespeare: Comedies and Romances*, Modern Critical Views, (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 279.

11) "...the myth of Venice, already a potent imaginative construct in Shakespeare's own day," J. R. Mulryne, "History and Myth in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare's Italy*, Michele Marrapodi et al. ed. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 87.

12) These details of the myth are collected from Halio's Introduction and the following three articles, "...an awareness of the heady mix of political order, mercantile success and sexual glamour that made up the popular image of Venice for the Elizabethans," ibid. ; "Actually, in Venice festive culture played a very important role," Roberta Mullini, "Streets, Squares, and Courts: Venice as a Stage in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson," *Shakespeare's Italy*, Michele Marrapodi et al. ed. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 158; "...the town as an ancient, independent, tolerant and righteous state...," ibid., 160; "The solemn aspect of the administration of justice were part of the widespread idea of Venice: they contributed the myth of the town in the same way as its private and public ceremonies," ibid., 163; "Visitors were impressed by the exceptional variety of nationalities to be seen in Venice, both travelers and alien residents," Leo Salinger, "The Idea of Venice in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson," *Shakespeare's Italy*, Michele Marrapodi et al. ed. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 173; Mullini points out that Venice also had negative images as well as being Catholic: "...a stereotyped idea of Italy as the land of corrupt power and lost glory," Mullini, 163; she says Jonson used the negative images of Venice in *Volpone*: "The law is continually neglected and justice corrupted. Law courts and their 'Avocatori' as well as lawyers, far from being righteous, are subjected to corruption," ibid., 164; Mullini explains the religious condition of Venice quoting from R. Dutton, *Ben*

Jonson, (Cambridge, 1988), 150: However Venice was less catholic than, say, Rome, since Venice was anti- Papal: "the city was Catholic but maintained its independence of the Papacy and of other Catholic power," ibid. , 166.

13) All references are to John Russell Brown ed., *The Merchant of Venice* (London and New York: Methuen, 1955).

14) "The tenor of his argument is that justice must be maintained because if it is not foreign investors may withdraw their money," Nuttall, 287.

15) "Shylock's threat becomes so grave because the trial is based on a bourgeois commitment to binding contracts," Cohen, 81.

16) W. H. Auden, "Brothers and Others," *The Dyer's Hand,* Faber and Faber Ltd and Random House Inc, 1963, rpt. in *A Casebook: The Merchant of Venice,* ed. John Wilders, (New York: St. Macmillan, 1969), 224.

17) Auden says Venice "is also a city inhabited by various communities...who do not regard each other personally as brothers, but must tolerate each other's existence because both are indispensable to the proper functioning of their society, and this toleration is enforced by the laws of the Venetian state," ibid., 225-26.

18) "In the play's overall design, Venice is a world of money...The love of Antonio and Bassanio expresses itself through money" Alexsander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London: Methuen, 1973), 122; "Financial considerations have become so natural to them and are so embedded into their psyches that they have become not quite but almost invisible; they can never be identified as a distinct aspect of behavior," Girard, 245.

19) Bullough, 464.

20) Bullough, 514 .

21) Cohen, 74.

22) Ruth Nevo, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London: Methuen, 1980), 127; Auden says: "Bassanio seems to be one of those people whose attitude towards money is a hat of a child," W. H. Auden, 237.

23) Halio, 24.

24) "Even Basanio's wooing to Portia, 'a lady richly left', has a clear financial base, for all his praise of her beauty," Leggat, 122.

25) Bssanio is not an out-and-out fortune-hunter who is after Portia for her money. He really loves her and her wealth is simply a component of her general attractiveness," Nuttall, 281.

26) "On every possible occasion Shakespeare pursued the parallel between the amorous venture of Bassanio and the typical Venetian business of Antonio, his commerce on the high seas," Girard, 244.

27) Cohen, 84.

28) Leslie Fiedler, *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (Stein and Day, New York, 1972), 101.

29) Rob Smith, *Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice,* Cambridge Student Guide (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 67.

30) Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 20.

31) "It is capable of arousing more than a spasm of compassion for Shylock and more than a touch of uneasiness regarding the manners and morals of his errant daughter," Nevo, 117.

32) Bullough, 454.

33) Halio, 14-16.

34) "Shylock has lost his daughter and his money (placed, even in his own speeches, on the same level of importance)," Leggatt, 130.

35) Barber, 184.

36) Burke says "it was natural to represent Lent as emaciated ...as a kill-joy," Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978; revised and rpt. Hampshire: Ashgate, 1999),188; Barber, 8, 163-165.

37) Halio, 193, n. 1.

38) Ibid. , 31-32; as Antonio doesn't reveal the reason why he says this, we can only guess as to the reason why he says this as well as to his melancholy. However, I admit that supposing Antonio is "an unconscious homosexual" can account for his melancholy and his low self-esteem, Midgley, 199.

39) Auden sees the lines as revealing "those who preach mercy and brotherhood as universal obligations limit them in practice and are prepared to treat certain classes being as things," Auden, 233.

40) Barber explains the historical background of antipathy towards them: "the 1590's were a period when London was becoming conscious of itself as wealthy and cultivated, so that it could consider great commercial Venice as a prototype. And yet there were at the same time traditional suspicions of the profit motive and newly urgent anxieties of power of money to disrupt human relations," Barber, 167.

41) "The sexual joking of Gratiano's final speech narrows the implications of love to the two pairs of lovers going off to bed, and Antonio can have no part in this," Leggatt, 148-149.

42) Auden, 234.

43) Leggat, 130.

44) "...the growing threat of indebtedness facing both aristocratic landlords and, above all, small independent producers, who could easily decline to working class status," Cohen, 73.

45) "...the in disputable contemporary fact that merchants were the leading usurers: suspicion of Italian traders run particularly high," ibid.,74.

46) "...one purpose of the form is to reconcile the irreconcilable," ibid., 79.

47) Barber, 167.

48) Mulryne shows a historical fact that in the sixteenth century, "the mind of the Venetian nobility was ...turning away from maritime affairs and commerce, and turning instead towards the pleasures and profits of life on the mainland," Mulryne, 93.

49) Cohen, 81.

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